



Following a flawed attempt by animator Ralph Bakshi to adapt J.R.R. Tolkien's legendary fantasy epic 'The Lord of the Rings' for the screen, it seemed that the the rich mythology of Middle-earth would be forever consigned to the imaginations of the book's legion of fans. But in July of 1998, fantasy became reality as New Zealand director and die-hard Tolkien fan Peter Jackson (*Braindead*, *Heavenly Creatures*) was given the greenlight to visualise *The Lord of the Rings* as a live-action film trilogy. Initially conceived as two films, Jackson pitched his ambitious vision to Miramax who were only prepared to fund one feature, an impossible compromise that eventually led Jackson and partner Fran Walsh to prolific studio New Line Cinema for financing. Not only were New Line prepared to back the pictures, but in a logical assessment that excited Jackson to no end, Chairman Bob Shaye suggested that since there were three books they should be made as a trilogy. New Line subsequently acquired the rights to Tolkien's epic from Miramax, who had optioned them on Jackson's behalf from Saul Zaentz - producer of Bakshi's animated version, and motion picture history was about to be made. Electing to shoot in his native New Zealand - a picturesque haven whose breathtaking vistas have been showcased in *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* and the small screen adventures of *Hercules* and *Xena: Warrior Princess* - Jackson began work on all three films, a colossal undertaking that would span 15 months. Despite initial concerns over the scale of the project and the

unprecedented step of shooting all three films simultaneously, New Line nevertheless recognised the practical advantages as executive producer Mark Ordesky explains: "We preferred to look at the opportunities, the economics of scale in shooting all three films back-to-back. First of all it would be impossible, but if you could make the films one at a time every two years or so, you'd never get all 22 actors together... there's risks to making any film but the opportunities and upsides were so dramatic that it was worth taking on."

With the exception of the *Austin Powers* films, Ordesky cites New Line's frustrating history in attempting to sequelise their more successful films like *The Mask* and *Dumb & Dumber*. *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy therefore presented the studio with an unmissable opportunity to not only capitalise on a film franchise "with an amazing base of fans" but "have all the sequels done, realise the economics of scale" while remaining "true to the artistic vision of Tolkien being filtered through Peter and Fran".

From working with Francis Ford Coppola on *Apocalypse Now* to overseeing production duties on *The Matrix*, producer Barrie M. Osborne is no stranger to sprawling productions and likens his partnership with Jackson to that of Coppola. "I love working with Peter... he reminds me in many ways of Francis because he works in close collaboration with the cast, so as the script is evolving it incorporates the ideas of the cast so that it draws upon the strength of the actors and their thoughts. I actually enjoy working that way..."

FANTASY ON FILM



EXCALIBUR (1981)
John Boorman's magnificent ode to the Arthur legend was a cinematic oddity - a fantasy film that actually delivered the goods.



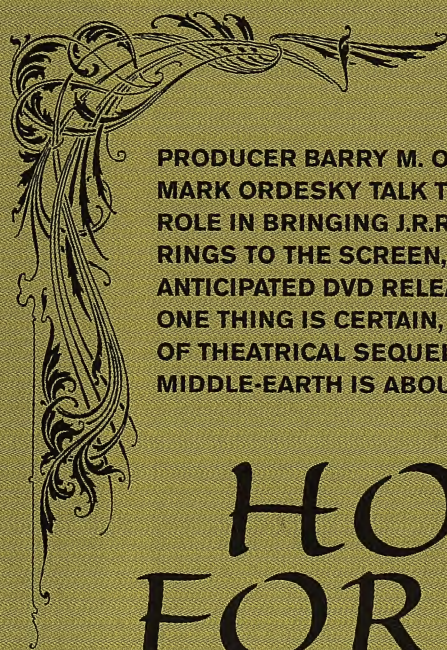
THE SWORD & THE SORCERER (1982)
Exploitation hack Albert Pyun injects some welcome nudity and gore into the genre in this undeniably guilty pleasure.



THE DARK CRYSTAL (1983)
With its all muppet cast, Frank Oz and Jim Henson's elaborate fable went places others couldn't. Equally astonishing and annoying.



THE NEVERENDING STORY (1984)
Wolfgang Petersen's heavy-handed but superbly realised allegory for the human imagination remains one of the finest examples of the genre.



PRODUCER BARRY M. OSBORNE AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER MARK ORDESKY TALK TO **REGION 4** ABOUT NEW LINE CINEMA'S ROLE IN BRINGING J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S LEGENDARY EPIC THE LORD OF THE RINGS TO THE SCREEN, AND WHAT WE CAN EXPECT FROM THE HOTLY ANTICIPATED DVD RELEASE.

ONE THING IS CERTAIN, WITH TWO DVDS DUE THIS YEAR AND A PAIR OF THEATRICAL SEQUELS STILL TO COME, THE MYTHICAL REALM OF MIDDLE-EARTH IS ABOUT TO BECOME...

HOBBIT FORMING

Interview by Scott Hocking

sometimes it's tough because the script evolves and becomes more organic - it changes, grows, and it means some of your planning also has to embrace that concept so you can achieve what you're setting out to do."

Despite its enormous potential for grand cinematic treatment, fantasy on film has a less than impressive track record, having been largely marginalised by an overtly juvenile approach. The eighties saw a concerted effort to popularise the genre at the rate of one major release every year (see below) but with inconsistent results. Despite the sterling contributions of Jim Henson's Creature Shop to ambitious productions like *The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*, or the whimsical nature of Rob Reiner's cult favourite *The Princess Bride*, fantasy films continued to careen between the adequate and the awkward.

"I don't think it's been well executed," Ordesky offers. "People haven't brought to it a level of quality... *Lord of the Rings* is really an epic drama set against a fantasy backdrop. That's how Peter looks at it."

Osbourne agrees, and like Jackson sees *The Lord of the Rings* not only restoring credibility to the genre but transcending its

traditional elements. "When I look at the movies and the relevance of the story... you have all these characters but you can relate to Aragorn, Boromir, Frodo and the challenges... and not as though they're fantasy characters but as people with real issues that they have to solve for themselves, so I think it has lots of relevance in that appeal to the public as well as having this fantastical setting

and these great creatures. So instead of appealing to just kids or only adults it actually crosses a broad spectrum. It's an adult story with action and

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With both *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* having altered the playing field of filmic fantasy forever, a resurgence in the genre seems inevitable. Ordesky is quick to agree: "Hollywood is fond of imitation. It's a good thing, there'll be a lot of interest and people will try and put these movies together and I hope they're successful because I love this genre."

Moreover, like *Harry Potter's* successful transition from page to



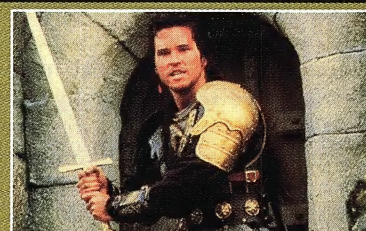
LEGEND (1985)
Gorgeously shot but uneven fairytale from Ridley Scott with a dentally challenged Tom Cruise facing off against Tim Curry's blood-red demon.



LABYRINTH (1986)
As the Goblin King, David Bowie nicks Jennifer Connelly's baby brother and Limahl's hairdo. The first musical fantasy spectacular?



THE PRINCESS BRIDE (1987)
Championed by its legion of fans as the best of the best, Rob Reiner's charming fairytale has it all - sly satire, ample wit, swashbuckling adventure & "true love".



WILLOW (1988)
Think *Lord of the Rings* as directed by Ron Howard, complete with dream cast - ewok Warwick Davis, Val Kilmer and a nekkid Patricia Hayes. Yikes!

screen, one of the crucial ingredients in adapting *The Lord of the Rings* was astute casting which Ordesky reveals was very much a collaborative process between Jackson and New Line.

"People often like to talk about the filmmaker versus the studio... there was none of that. Peter wanted to cast the movies in such a way that you wouldn't be self conscious - like 'oh there goes Sean Connery... I mean Gandalf' or 'Mel Gibson! I mean Aragorn...'" He wanted to cast for the *roles* and New Line was in full agreement. We actually had a 'dream list' we went after and we achieved virtually every single person! Ian McKellan was always first choice for Gandalf. Ian Holm was always first choice for Bilbo... we never had to go further than our second or third ideal choice in any of the 22 roles to achieve the casting... which is sort of unprecedented in typical Hollywood filmmaking."

The pivotal role of the Ring-bearer was another matter, however. According to Osborne, following a fruitless search in England Jackson and Walsh had virtually given up hope on finding their ideal Frodo when, miraculously, their hobbit hero found them.

"In the case of Frodo, Elijah Wood came forward. He knew Peter and Fran were looking... and he thought he didn't have a chance. So he thought the only way... is if he did his own audition so he got a dialogue coach, a wig, a hobbit outfit and got a friend to videotape his audition." "And if you saw that tape there was no discussion..." adds Ordesky. Indeed, upon receiving Wood's audition video a delighted Jackson declared "there's Frodo!"

Wood was not the only star thoroughly committed to Jackson's vision. Osborne also recalls brooding character actor Viggo Mortensen's passion for the role of Aragorn. "Viggo was doing the fight at Helm's Deep [a major set piece of *The Two Towers*] and he'd rehearsed with our swordmaster Bob Anderson. There was a series of three Uruk-hai that were despatched by Viggo and then a fourth Uruk-hai came up and we were supposed to cut there. So we're shooting this scene and when the fourth Uruk-hai comes up and we cut the camera but instead of stopping he kept on with his thrust and hit Viggo right across the mouth and broke a tooth. Now unlike most actors you'd have say 'get me my phone I'm gonna call my lawyer', Viggo said 'Do you have any superglue?' because he just wanted to keep on filming..."

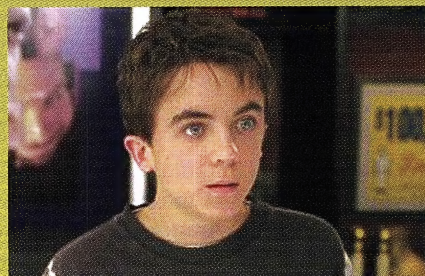
In the absence of said adhesive Mortensen was given the appropriate dental assistance during the lunch break and was promptly back on set to finish the scene.

ROLE CALL

While New Line had the luxury of dream casting, R4 speculates on what might have been had the Fellowship followed a more direct-to-video route...



CHRISTOPHER LAMBERT as GANDALF
McKellan purists might argue there can be only one but we know better. Much genre experience, a commanding presence and funny accent make Messr Lambert the perfect choice for Middle-earth's mage. And he's always available!



FRANKIE MUNIZ as FRODO
Adored by millions, the *Malcolm in the Middle* star has the Hobbitish qualities for a credible Frodo - the height, the eyes and the big furry feet. Not to mention great spin-off series potential for 'Malcolm in the Middle-earth'!



DAVID CARUSO as ARAGORN
Brooding loner and perennial tough nut. Having hunted down John Rambo and put up with Dennis Franz, the Orcs are small fry. A man of few words (and roles) who's cheap and glows in the dark!



ANGIE EVERHART as GALADRIEL
Ethereally beautiful (with enough backlight) and flighty as a fairy, this love goddess knows what to do with a ring!



With Jackson an ardent buff of the DVD format it comes as no surprise that the imminent home video release of *The Fellowship of the Ring* will be as much an event as the forthcoming theatrical sequels *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*.

"There's two DVD's coming..." Osborne reveals, "the August release and an extended DVD in November. Both of them are, in effect, a 'Director's Cut'. The August one is the theatrical experience and a separate disc of supplemental material including a 10 minute preview of *The Two Towers* - which is great - Enya music video and 15 behind-the-scenes featurettes."

Ordesky confirms that DVD content was indeed taken into account during filming with a dedicated videographer employed before the film even began pre-production. "No-one has ever made three films simultaneously, no one has ever made sequels to a previously unsuccessful first film [Bakshi's]... the film has so many firsts that we all felt it was important for the fans to chronicle - for good or bad - everything that happened. So the DVD's are incredibly rich in supplemental material."



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"People have such a passion for the movie and even though we really restricted access and photos on the set, certain departments did their own photos and videos which will appear on the DVD", Osborne adds. "We have hours and hours of video that was shot by a guy named Costa Botes... who's a director in his own right and a film critic in NZ. Costa actually collaborated with Peter on a great little mockumentary called *Forgotten Silver* so he's the one who did all the behind-the-scenes stuff."

Ideally timed to heighten anticipation for *The Two Towers*, the four disc 'Special Extended Edition' released November 12 includes not only an all new expanded version of *The Fellowship of the Ring* but six hours of additional content providing in-depth insight into the production process and four audio commentaries.

Ordesky promises "at least 30 minutes of new material seamlessly integrated into the cut... so it's an entirely new film experience."

Additional footage will include some deeper resonance for Aragorn's character and an essential scene in which Galadriel distributes gifts which will assist the Fellowship in their quest. A 'Collector's DVD Gift Set' will also be available Nov 12 with box art designed by renowned Tolkien illustrator Alan Lee and containing the Extended Edition DVD, customised bookends designed by LOTR special fx artists WETA, and a National Geographic documentary 'Beyond the Movie' featuring two previously unseen featurettes and a photo gallery.

As *The Fellowship of the Ring* makes its way into homes this August and November, the hotly anticipated second installment in the trilogy - *The Two Towers* - is poised to arrive in cinemas. In fact Osborne confirms that "film two has been sitting, basically maturing since about September of last year. It had temp effects, it was finished, you could watch it and preview it if you wished to which was a choice we made not to do. We made a choice not to preview our movies but rather go on our internal judgement between Peter, Fran, [co-writer] Phillipa [Boyens], myself and other people intimately involved with the film and then - at the appropriate stage - sharing it with New Line. They became, in effect, our preview audience. Now that Peter's fully engaged in it he's able to go back and look at this film with a fresh perspective and say 'gee, I could actually improve on some of these things' so that's what we're doing. We're in the process of doing that right now... and have actually been doing some additional photography, delineating some of the roles in a stronger fashion than they otherwise would have been had we just made the movie and released it."

"And this is the same dynamic we applied to film one, identically..." concludes Ordesky, "...and it's the same dynamic we'll apply to film three [*The Return of the King*]."

Bring 'em on!

***The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* is released on DVD August 6 and is reviewed on page 60.**